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Bureau of Plant Industry

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Carpet Beetles

There are two beetles found commonly damaging carpets, furs and woolens about the house. They are both known as the "Buffalo beetle" or "Buffalo moth."

The beetle stage of these insects is not frequently seen. In the spring and early summer this form is found on window panes and about certain flowers. They feed on the pollen of flowers.

The "moth" stage is really the larval stage of the beetle and it is this stage which feeds on the furs and woolens and causes the damage in the household. The larvae or grubs are about one-quarter of an inch long and clothed with long brown hairs. They seriously injure carpets by eating the woolen portions and are frequently observed to follow a crack in the floor, cutting a slit in the carpet or they may eat large holes in carpets around the edges where they have been tacked down.

Control

Remove the carpets to a line out of doors and thoroughly clean. Wash the floors with hot soapy water and carefully fill the cracks in the floor and washboards with kerosene. Afterward fill the cracks with some good crack filler. Before relaying the carpet it is well to place a covering of a paper especially prepared with coal tar next to the floor. Where such paper is not easily obtained newspapers may be used. The edges of the carpet should be lifted frequently and examined for the presence of the beetle larvae.

Localized infestations may be satisfactorily controlled by covering the spot with a wet cloth and pressing it with a hot iron. The steam driven through the carpet will kill all stages of the insect.

The treating of infested furniture is not at all easy. Where it is possible to saturate the infested upholstering with kerosene all insects present will be killed. Before this treatment is made one should consider the odor which is sure to remain for some time

after such treatment. Gasoline may be used, but it is not always a certain kill. The danger of fire and explosion must be considered when using gasoline and its use should not be attempted in doors.

Fumigation of the house with hydrocyanic acid will kill all forms of insect life. This operation, however, is work for one well aware of the deadly nature of the gas and experienced in its use. Temperature of 130 degrees F. maintained for a period of eight or ten hours is fatal to insect life; and where it is possible to maintain such a temperature an excellent control will result. Warm weather usually makes the ordinary heating equipment about the house effective in securing this temperature.

Where these insects are found in wearing apparel or articles easily fumigated in a trunk or other tight receptacle, use carbon bisulphide. Place the articles in the trunk or receptacle, put a pie plate or other shallow vessel on top and place a half teacupful of carbon bisulphide in it and close the trunk for 24 to 48 hours without opening. If a tight trunk is not at hand use an empty barrel for a receptacle during the fumigation.

WARNING. Carbon bisulphide vapor is explosive and inflammable. Keep away all lights and fires during the period of fumigation. Air the clothing and place in tight paper bags for the protection from future infestations.